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ACTION EAP-00

INFO	LOG-00	NP-00	ACQ-00	CIAE-00	DOTE-00	DS-00	EB-00
	FAAE-00	FBIE-00	UTED-00	VC-00	TEDE-00	INR-00	IO-00
	LAB-01	VCE-00	NSAE-00	OIC-02	IRM-00	SS-00	TEST-00
	DSCC-00	DRL-02	NFAT-00	SAS-00	/005W		
				-----4A2108	120136Z	/38	

FM AMCONSUL HO CHI MINH CITY
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5783
INFO AMEMBASSY HANOI
USMISSION GENEVA
ASEAN COLLECTIVE
USCINCPAC HONOLULU HI
JICPAC HONOLULU HI
SECDEF WASHDC
DIA WASHDC
NSC WASHDC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 HO CHI MINH CITY 001381

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EAP/BCLTV AND EAP/PD/MSPEER
DEPARTMENT ALSO FOR DRL/IRF
DEPARTMENT ALSO FOR INR/EAP/SEA AND INR/IL/B
CINCPAC FOR FPA
SECDEF FOR ISA/EA/ABLAGG

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV PHUM KIRF PINR PREL VM RELFREE HUMANR ETMIN](#)

SUBJECT: RANKING POLITBURO MEMBER TALKS ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS, BILATERAL RELATIONS

1. SUMMARY: AS THE FOURTH-RANKING MEMBER IN VIETNAM'S POLITBURO, HO CHI MINH CITY'S COMMUNIST PARTY SECRETARY NGUYEN MINH TRIET IS A MAJOR POLITICAL FORCE. IN A MEETING WITH CONSUL GENERAL, TRIET EMPHATICALLY DEFENDED VIETNAM'S RECORD ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND RELIGIOUS FREEDOM. BUT HE INVITED CG TO FURTHER DISCUSSIONS ON THESE AND OTHER ISSUES "WHERE GAPS REMAIN", IN AN EFFORT TO IMPROVE MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN THE TWO GOVERNMENTS. END SUMMARY.

TRIET: "WE SHOULD NOT AVOID RAISING SENSITIVE ISSUES"

2. CONSUL GENERAL PAID AN INITIAL COURTESY CALL ON MR. NGUYEN MINH TRIET ON DECEMBER 10, AT HCMC COMMUNIST PARTY HEADQUARTERS. TRIET OPENED THE MEETING, NOTING THAT HE BELIEVED THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BILATERAL TRADE AGREEMENT WILL OPEN A "NEW ERA" OF IMPROVED BILATERAL RELATIONS BETWEEN VIETNAM AND THE U.S. IMPLEMENTATION WILL PREPARE VIETNAM FOR ACCESSION TO THE WTO - "THE NEXT STEP" -- HE SAID, AND HE LOOKED FORWARD TO WORKING WITH CONGEN DURING THAT PROCESS.

3. LIKENING THE U.S. AND VIETNAM TO FAMILY MEMBERS, TRIET SAID IT IS NORMAL FOR TWO COUNTRIES TO HAVE DIFFERENCES ON CERTAIN ISSUES. HE ADDED, HOWEVER, THAT GOVERNMENTS SHOULD NOT AVOID CONFRONTING ISSUES WHERE THERE ARE "GAPS IN UNDERSTANDING," ESPECIALLY WHEN SUCH
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DISCUSSIONS COULD MOVE THE TWO SIDES CLOSER TOGETHER. HE SAID NEITHER SIDE SHOULD HESITATE TO RAISE SENSITIVE MATTERS.

4. CG THEN ASKED TRIET WHAT HE THOUGHT WERE THE MOST CONTENTIOUS ISSUES IN THE U.S.-VIETNAM BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP. TRIET DID NOT TAKE THE BAIT. HE RESPONDED ONLY THAT WE SHOULD FIND SOLUTIONS TO PROBLEMS THROUGH MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING; WE SHOULD NOT MAKE MOUNTAINS OUT OF MOLEHILLS; AND WE SHOULD NOT ALLOW DIFFERENCES TO TURN US INTO OPPONENTS.

CG: "THEN LET'S TALK ABOUT THICH QUANG DO..."

5. CG SAID SHE WOULD TAKE UP TRIET'S INVITATION TO RAISE A COUPLE OF SENSITIVE ISSUES. SHE NOTED THAT THICH QUANG DO, THE SECOND-RANKING MONK OF THE BANNED UNIFIED BUDDHIST CHURCH OF VIETNAM, HAS BEEN UNDER HOUSE ARREST AND HAS NOT BEEN ALLOWED TO RECEIVE VISITORS SINCE JUNE. REMINDING TRIET THAT THE GERMAN

EMBASSY HAD BEEN REFUSED A VISIT, SHE THEN ASKED TRIET IF HE THOUGHT IT WOULD BE POSSIBLE TO VISIT DO.

16. TRIET SAID HE WAS PROUD OF VIETNAM'S RECORD ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND FREEDOM OF RELIGION. VIETNAM STRUGGLED FOR CENTURIES FOR INDEPENDENCE, AND NOW THAT INDEPENDENCE HAS BEEN ACHIEVED, HE SAID, PEOPLE KNOW TRUE FREEDOM. ONE HALF MILLION CATHOLICS, MANY MORE BUDDHISTS, AND MEMBERS OF SEVERAL OTHER RELIGIOUS GROUPS IN HCMC HAVE THE FREEDOM TO WORSHIP, DECLARED TRIET. BUT, HE ADDED, UNCLASSIFIED

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THERE ARE A VERY FEW PERSONS WHO ABUSE THESE FREEDOMS. IN DOING SO THEY BREAK THE LAW. THESE ARE CIVIL CASES, HE SAID, NOT CASES OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM, AND ARE DEALT WITH ACCORDING TO VIETNAMESE LAW.

17. CG REPLIED THAT NO MATTER HOW VIETNAM MIGHT CHARACTERIZE THICH QUANG DO, HE IS AN INTERNATIONAL FIGURE AND MANY PEOPLE IN OTHER COUNTRIES ARE CONCERNED ABOUT HIS HEALTH AND WELL BEING.

18. TRIET DECLARED THAT DO WAS IN GOOD HEALTH, AND THAT THE GVN IS TAKING GOOD CARE OF HIM, SENDING A PHYSICIAN REGULARLY TO MONITOR HIS HEALTH. HE WAS FULLY AWARE THAT SHOULD ANYTHING GO WRONG WITH DO'S HEALTH, "THERE ARE SOME PEOPLE WHO WOULD TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THAT SITUATION" TO MAKE VIETNAM LOOK BAD.

19. CG SAID SHE WOULD CERTAINLY TAKE TRIET AT HIS WORD THAT DO'S HEALTH WAS BEING LOOKED AFTER AND WOULD REPORT THIS TO THE EMBASSY AND WASHINGTON. THIS DID NOT MEAN, HOWEVER, THAT SHE WOULD NOT SEEK TO VISIT DO IN THE FUTURE. TRIET LET THAT PASS.

...AND ACCESS TO THE CENTRAL HIGHLANDS"

10. CG TOLD TRIET THAT SHE HAD PLANNED TO VISIT THE CENTRAL HIGHLANDS THIS WEEK, BUT DAK LAK AND KON TUM PROVINCES HAD, LATE LAST FRIDAY, NOTIFIED THE CONGEN THAT THE PROVINCIAL PEOPLE'S COMMITTEES WERE TOO BUSY TO RECEIVE HER. SHE NOTED HOW IMPORTANT IT WAS FOR DIPLOMATS TO BE ABLE TO TRAVEL, MEET PEOPLE, AND REPORT ACCURATELY AND FAIRLY ON WHAT THEY SEE AND HEAR. SHE ASKED TRIET'S ADVICE ON HOW TO BEST PROCEED.

11. TRIET ACKNOWLEDGED THAT, EARLIER IN THE YEAR, TRAVEL TO THE CENTRAL HIGHLANDS WAS RESTRICTED BECAUSE OF SECURITY PROBLEMS. HE STATED, HOWEVER, THAT IT WAS CURRENT STATE POLICY "NOT TO PROHIBIT ANYONE" FROM VISITING THE CENTRAL HIGHLANDS. HE PROMISED TO VOICE HIS SUPPORT OF CONGEN TRAVEL TO THE AREA.

12. TRIET ACKNOWLEDGED THAT THE LEVEL OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN THE CENTRAL HIGHLANDS LAGGED BEHIND MOST OF VIETNAM'S OTHER PROVINCES. HE ALSO ACKNOWLEDGED THAT WITHIN THE CENTRAL HIGHLANDS, ETHNIC MINORITY GROUPS LAGGED BEHIND ETHNIC VIETNAMESE KINH, BOTH ECONOMICALLY AND EDUCATIONALLY. HE EMPHASIZED THAT THE GVN HAD DEVISED POLICIES FOR IMPROVING THE LIVING UNCLASSIFIED

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STANDARDS FOR THE CENTRAL HIGHLAND MINORITY GROUPS AND THAT, COMPARED TO 25 YEARS AGO, THEIR SITUATION HAD IMPROVED GREATLY.

13. THE UNREST IN THE CENTRAL HIGHLANDS OCCURRED, ACCORDING TO TRIET, BECAUSE OUTSIDERS ENCOURAGED SOME DISSATISFIED PERSONS TO AGITATE FOR AN AUTONOMOUS STATE. TRIET SAID VIETNAM WOULD BE FIRM AGAINST ANY NOTION OF AUTONOMY, BUT AT THE SAME TIME WOULD CONTINUE TO WORK TOWARD IMPROVING THE LIVES OF ITS ETHNIC MINORITIES. VIETNAM IS A UNIFIED COUNTRY, HE EMPHASIZED, AND WILL REMAIN SO.

BIONOTE

14. TRIET WAS BORN IN BINH DUONG (FORMERLY SONG BE) PROVINCE, JUST NORTH OF SAIGON, AND GREW UP IN SAIGON. DURING THE WAR YEARS, HE WORKED FOR THE CENTRAL COMMUNIST PARTY MASS MOBILIZATION COMMITTEE, SOUTHERN BUREAU. DURING 1976-1987, HE WORKED FOR THE CENTRAL HO CHI MINH YOUTH UNION. IN 1991, HE BECAME SECRETARY OF THE SONG BE PROVINCE COMMUNIST PARTY COMMITTEE, AND FROM JANUARY TO DECEMBER 1997, HE WAS VICE-CHAIRMAN OF THE HCMC COMMUNIST PARTY COMMITTEE (WHILE CONCURRENTLY VICE-CHAIRMAN OF THE HCMC PEOPLE'S COMMITTEE). FROM HCMC, HE WENT TO HANOI TO HEAD THE POWERFUL MASS MOBILIZATION COMMITTEE OF THE CENTRAL COMMUNIST PARTY. IN JANUARY 2000, HE RETURNED TO HCMC AS THE CITY'S COMMUNIST PARTY CHIEF. IN APRIL 2001, HE MOVED UP TO NUMBER FOUR IN THE POLITBURO, OUTRANKED ONLY BY THE

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PRESIDENT, PRIME MINISTER AND COMMUNIST PARTY GENERAL
SECRETARY. SOME OBSERVERS BELIEVE TRIET WILL BECOME

SIPDIS
VIETNAM'S NEXT PRIME MINISTER. HE IS 59-YEARS OLD.

COMMENT

15. TRIET PROVED TRUE TO HIS REPUTATION OF BEING
ENGAGING AND PERSONABLE, IF SOMEWHAT DOCTRINAIRE. HE
DID NOT BAT AN EYELASH WHEN THE CG SAID WE WOULD HOLD
HIM TO HIS WORD ABOUT THE HEALTH OF THICH QUANG DO.
CONGEN WILL STILL SEEK TO VISIT DO. CG IS MOVING AHEAD
WITH HER TRIP TO THE CENTRAL HIGHLANDS. RESPONDING TO
TRJET'S NUMEROUS OFFERS TO DISCUSS SENSITIVE BILATERAL
ISSUES "OR ANY OTHER PROBLEMS", CG SAID PERHAPS IN A
MORE INFORMAL SETTING, OVER LUNCH OR DINNER. TRIET
SORT OF SAID "UUHMM". CONGEN WILL SEEK AN APPROPRIATE
TIME TO MEET WITH TRIET TO CONTINUE THE DIALOGUE WITH
HIM. YAMAUCHI

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